

# A Cabinet for political survival

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A controversial appointment almost eclipses Anwar's maiden Cabinet but it is generally a line-up of younger and fresher faces.

THE most asked question in the last one week has finally been answered.

And the answer is: Yes, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi is once again Deputy Prime Minister alongside Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof of Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS).

The man responsible for Barisan Nasional throwing its support behind Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has made a grand but controversial return to the office he occupied from 2015 to 2018.

It is the mother of all ironies that Ahmad Zahid has gone from zero to hero among Pakatan Harapan supporters. They know that without him, Anwar would not be where he is.

It has not been easy for Anwar to accommodate the demands of his new partners.

Barisan felt it deserved portfolios that befit its role as kingmaker while GPS had its own Sarawak-centric priorities.

Anwar promised a lean Cabinet but the end result was anything but lean.

There are a total of 25 ministers with another three portfolios held by the Prime Minister and the two Deputy Prime Ministers.



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## Analysis

It is only slightly less crowded than the previous 33-person Cabinet.

The most interesting part of Anwar's Cabinet was in the economic appointments.

The Prime Minister, whose top priority is economic recovery, is also Finance Minister.

Former Petronas president and CEO Tan Sri Hassan Marican has been roped in as an economic adviser because the reputed technocrat can help inject investor confidence.

Pandan MP Rafizi Ramli, whose supporters wanted him for the finance post, is Economy Minister.

The odd man out in the economic box is International Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz who

was certainly not in Anwar's short-list of candidates.

This is the second time that Tengku Zafrul, who lost in Kuala Selangor in the recent elections, is making a back door entry into the Cabinet.

It is a rather mixed bag of personalities that has been entrusted to revive the economy.

The same could be said for the general line-up, too.

"It is a line-up of younger and fresher faces especially those from PKR. They will bring down the average age of the Cabinet, making it the youngest Cabinet we've had in a long while," said political commentator Khaw Veon Szu.

It is also no coincidence that most of the ministers are Malays and Bumiputera.

Anwar understands the power of optics, especially given that the opposition bench is almost entirely Malay and Muslim.

A total of 15 portfolios went to Pakatan with PKR taking the lion's share.

Some think the political animal in Anwar is moving to strengthen his party.

But the fact is that PKR is a genuinely multiracial party, its

leaders are well-educated, they do not harp on race and religion and they represent a Malaysia that many of us want to see.

Those appointed are there on their own merit.

Was it a strategic move for DAP to accept only four ministerships? Was it to puncture accusations that DAP dominates the government?

DAP's portfolios - Transport, Local Government, Youth and Sports and Human Resources - are important and will enable the party to reach out to its base.

Its Damansara MP Gobind Singh Deo was said to have declined a seat in the Cabinet.

Anwar's other concern is to ensure that his government survives a full term and that means keeping his partners contented so they do not get up to any mischief.

Both Barisan and GPS got almost equal treatment although Ahmad Zahid was obviously the big winner, landing the Rural Development portfolio. It is a coveted ministry because of its outreach to the Malay heartland.

But some things are not meant to be and Rembau MP Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan, who many thought would be the Deputy Prime

Minister, ended up in Defence.

Anwar has eased into the job quite smoothly, be it the outpouring of support and attention wherever he goes to audiences at the palace.

Anyone else would have been overwhelmed by the sudden transition from Opposition leader to Prime Minister.

He has also set several admirable dos and don'ts - open tenders for projects, no new official car, no unnecessary renovations to his office, no gifts and no salary for himself.

The air is still filled with euphoria over the rise of Anwar and it has been quite comical and sad too to watch Pakatan supporters fall over themselves trying to justify partnering with Umno and downplaying corruption issues.

Some call it pragmatism. Others say it is for the sake of stability.

Actually, it is Machiavellian politics at its best where the end justifies the means.

But nobody wants to see more political instability and that is why Anwar should get a chance to do his job for the next five years.

The views expressed here are the writer's own.